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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Statement submitted by Family Welfare in Brazil Civil Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

Family Welfare in Brazil Civil Society (BEMFAM), a Brazilian non-governmental organization, in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, realizes that for a better understanding of the AIDS epidemic, it is necessary to consider the socioeconomic and cultural components, which make a major contribution to the inequality between men and women. It is understood that domestic and sexual violence against women, as well as discrimination and prejudice related to ethnic and sexual diversity, are expressions of this inequality.

In Brazil, women are the majority of the Brazilian population, they have a greater life expectancy than men (76/68) and they are increasingly taking on responsibilities as head of family and in the labour market. The increase of HIV incidence (respectively 15 women for 10 men) among women points to the conditions of exclusion and stigmatization to which they are submitted, mainly due to the social-cultural issues related to gender-based inequalities, such as the limitation of access to information, and to HIV/AIDS prevention, diagnosis and treatment. The universal access to treatment, implemented in the country since 1996, has resulted in the fall in the number of deaths, in the reduction of the hospitalizations related to AIDS, improving the quality of life of people living with HIV/AIDS. However, it still is a social challenge to translate the solutions implemented in order to overcome the different contexts of women's vulnerability to STDs and HIV/AIDS; to establish concrete actions that ensure the access to prevention methods in the health systems and to quality assistance.

In this context, Family Welfare in Brazil Civil Society (BEMFAM), in a gender-based perspective, has been collaborating with governmental sectors (Health Ministry, state and local departments of health) and civil society, developing efforts to integrate the prevention and treatment of STDs and AIDS to the model of care adopted in its services. In the field of social action, health and defense of sexual and reproductive rights in African and Latin America countries, Family Welfare in Brazil Civil Society (BEMFAM) cannot stop the fight to overcome gender-based inequality, which constitutes a serious obstacle to general health, mainly of women, as well as the exercise of rights and citizenship.

Considering the need to ensure equality of access and treatment of women and men in education and health and the need to promote health and sexual and reproductive rights of women and their autonomy, we call on all members of the international community- Governments, civil society and international agencies –to prioritize efforts to guarantee respect of the sexual and reproductive rights of women, with free choice of contraception methods; to support the conception for women who live with HIV/AIDS; to guarantee access to information, prevention and treatment of STD/HIV/AIDS, especially the reinforcement in the combat of congenital syphilis and the vertical transmission of the HIV/AIDS.

* Issued without formal editing.